structure for conducting any dialogue process. There is no agreement between the two countries on Jammu and Kashmir being a so-called "central" or "core" issue.

Measures to counter India's negative projection abroad

1268. DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India's negative projection abroad especially in the US has been reported by eminent personalities like UN civilian police adviser; and

(b) the measures proposed by the Indian Missions abroad to counter such projection and depict true picture for attracting foreign tourists?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Senior civil servants deployed with the United Nations Secretariat do not report on such issues to the Government of India.

(b) The Government is constantly taking steps to counter any negative projection and to project the correct perspective. These steps, include *inter-alia*, regular press briefings by the Official Spokesperson, production and dissemination of films and other audio-visual material including on tourism, publications in foreign languages, visits to India by eminent media personalities, organization of seminars and conferences on themes of critical relevance, involvement of Non Resident Indian, Persons of Indian Origin and tourism offices abroad in our publicity efforts, interaction by senior Indian diplomats with editorials boards of newspapers and on main television news programmes, and utilization of the internet for projecting the views of the Government and projecting India as a modern progressive country which is also an attractive tourist destination.

Indo-Pak Bilateral Trade

1269. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India-Pakistan bilateral trade at present stands at a dismal figure of $ 250 million per annum against its potential of $ 6 billion figure;

(b) whether Pakistan has not allowed India any trade concessions, starting with the Most Favoured Nation status;

(c) if so, the steps being taken to boost the trade between the two countries; and

(d) the reaction of Pakistan to the proposal of establishing a South Asian Union?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) As per available statistics (Source-DGCI & S, Kolkata), the India-Pakistan bilateral trade stood at US $ 250.33 million during the year 2002-03. There is significant scope for increase in bilateral trade between the two countries. According to some estimates, the bilateral trade has a potential of reaching the level of $ 6 billion if Pakistan follows a normal trade and economic regime with India. Pakistan, however, has continued to follow restrictive trade policies with India and attempts to hold any progress in this field hostage to political considerations.

(b) Pakistan has not yet provided the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to India though India continues to accord MFN status to Pakistan. Pakistan has also stymied any meaningful progress on SAPTA and SAFTA under SARRC framework.

(c) and (d) Prime Minister, in his statement in Parliament on May 2, 2003, had emphasized the importance of progress on economic cooperation between India and Pakistan for creating an environment in which more difficult issues between the two countries could be addressed. As a result, a business delegation from the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry visited India on July 7-8, 2003 at the invitation from Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

During its deliberation at Kathmandu on July 9-10, 2003, the SAARC Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries stressed the urgent need for finalizing the draft framework treaty on creating a free trade area, *i.e.* SAFTA, before the next Summit. It also directed that there should be substantial progress to report to the Summit on other parallel trade facilitation measures including the proposed regional agreement on promotion and protection of investments, avoidance of double taxation,

trade arbitration council, customs operation and harmonization of standards and measurements. All these trade facilitation measures are aimed at operationalizing SAFTA. Pakistan was a part of consensus reached during the Standing Committee deliberations at Kathmandu. Pakistan would be expected to cooperate in fully implementing the entire package of issues before the next Summit so as to make it meaningful.

While there is no well defined proposal for a South Asian Union on the table, India has declared its readiness to enter into discussions to work towards such a union, Pakistan has not reacted positively to this idea so far.

Attacks on Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan navy

1270. SHRI R. KAMARAJ: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the frequent attacks on the Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan navy causing great difficulties for Indian fishermen, especially from Nagapatinam and Rameswaram;

(b) whether Government have received any representation from fishermen association to solve this problem; and

(c) if so, what remedies are proposed by Government to solve this problem?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) The High Commission in Colombo received information that four fishermen who left Akkaraipettai village, Nagapattinam, in a catamaran for fishing at Pushpavanam were allegedly fired upon by the Sri Lankan Navy on 1st April, 2003, resulting in injury to one fisherman. When taken up by the High Commission, both the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and the Sri Lankan Navy denied having any role in the incident, stating that none of their patrol crafts was in that location on that day.

(b) Government does receive representations from various fishermen's associations following the apprehension of Indian fishermen at sea.

(c) The Government of India and the Government of Sri Lanka agree that the problem of fishermen straying into each other's waters should